

that a man marks either of these circumstances; for he could not reflect, without regret, that many children have grown into maturity and great talent, and many unformed or defective characters into established excellence, since the period when he ceased to become abler or better. Pope, at the age of fifty, would have been incomparably more mortified than, as Johnson says, his readers are, at the fact, if he had perceived it, that he could not then write materially better than he had written at the age of twenty. And the consciousness of having passed many years without any moral and religious progress, ought to be not merely the regret for an infelicity, but the remorse of guilt; since, though natural causes must somewhere have circumscribed and fixed the extent of the intellectual power, an advancement in the nobler distinctions has still continued to be possible, and will be possible till the evening of rational life. The instruction resulting from a clear estimate of what has been effected or not in this capital concern, is the chief advantage to be derived from recording the stages of life, comparing one part with another, and bringing the whole into a comparison with the standard of perfection, and the illustrious human examples which have approached that standard the nearest. In forming this estimate, we shall keep in view the vast series of advantages and monitions, which has run parallel to the train of years; and it will be inevitable to recollect, with severe mortification, the sanguine calculations of improvement of the best kind, which at various periods the mind delighted itself in making for other given future periods, should life be protracted till then, and promised itself most *certainly* to realize by the time of their arrival. The mortification will be still more grievous, if there was at those past seasons something more hopeful than mere confident presumptions, if there were actual favourable omens, which partly justified while they raised, in ourselves and others, anticipations that have mournfully failed. My dear friend, it is very melancholy that EVIL must be so palpable, so hatefully conspicuous to an enlightened conscience, in every retrospect of a human life.

If the supposed memoirs be to be carried forward as life advances, each period being recorded as soon as it has elapsed, they should not be composed by small daily or